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ABSTRACT

Vocational education must be accessible to all students because it has inherent value to a large spectrum of students in secondary schools, not just to those who are majoring in a vocational area. It is a natural setting for the integration of mathematics, science, social studies, economics, communications, and environmental studies; it is also a first-hand approach to education; and an opportunity to explore the world of work. Access to vocational education has three dimensions. First, there is the element of availability of vocational programs to all students. Second, there is the all-important issue of access to knowledge once the student is in a vocational program or course. Third, it implies access to the services provided through vocational education. These three dimensions of access to vocational education are based on the idea that it is an integral part of the total educational system and not separate from the mainstream of education in public secondary and postsecondary schools. Some obstacles to access to vocational education are student unawareness of vocational offerings, high school graduation requirements, students' preoccupation with college entrance requirements, students being advised out of vocational opportunities, attitudes of school personnel and parents, travel time, scheduling, and lack of respect for varied learning styles. Access to vocational education should be ensured for all students, and all students should have access to the services it provides, such as counseling and job placement. (KC)

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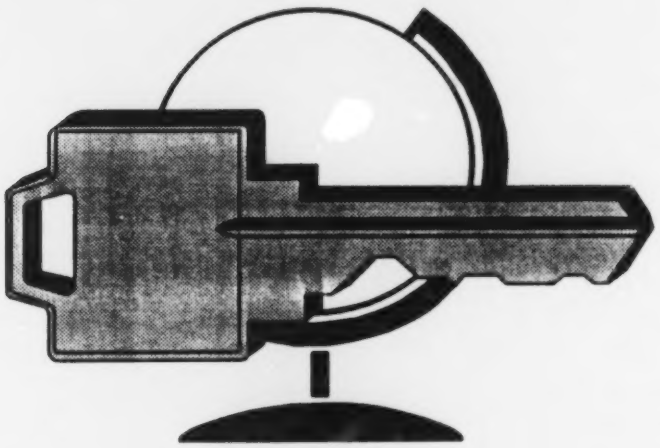
A KEY TO GLOBAL SUCCESS



ACCESS

to

VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION

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A POSITION PAPER OF THE

MARYLAND STATE COUNCIL
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January, 1991

A Position Paper

on

Access in Vocational Education

> ....The history of America has been founded on a path of opportunity; the future of America depends on our ability, not only to maintain the roads we have built, but to pave new pathways for the tremendous varieties of people who call America home. We have made but a start. The new task for everyone is to refine that vision, reaffirm its significance, and put it within reach of all out youth.
>
> From: The Forgotten Half (1988)

This is a position paper dealing with the "access" issue in vocational education. The term "access" is used with reference to such concepts as availability, openness, accessibility, obtainable, and ease of entrance. This is with particular respect to vocational education at the secondary school level and its accessibility to all students capable of profiting from courses, services and programs in this area.

> The increased level of access to the system is a vital part of system-wide accountability that must be maintained. In fact, access is one of the three basic concepts which drive all approaches to education in general.
>
> From: Communique, a newsletter of the State Council on Vocational Technical Education for Minnesota.

To whom is the paper directed?

This paper is directed towards an audience which would include: boards of education, school administrators, staff personnel, teachers, parent and teacher organizations, and support personnel in education.

What are the objectives of such a paper?

1. To develop an awareness of the issues concerned with "access" to vocational education.

2. To inform the reader of some of the dimensions of the "access" issue.

3. To promote a greater degree of openness and accessibility of vocational programs, courses and services to all individuals.

Why this Concern?

This section dealing with the "Why of this concern for access" is the result of a sincere and informed perception of the inherent value of vocational education to a larger spectrum of students at the secondary school level.

- It is a natural setting for the integration of mathematics, science, social studies, economics, communications, and environmental studies. It is a form of education that can provide a sense of "relevance," "significance," and "meaning" to the other subjects in the school.

- It is a first-hand approach to education.
  ...First-hand knowledge is the ultimate basis of intellectual life.
  ...What the learned world tends to offer is one second-hand scrap of information illustrating ideas derived from another second-hand scrap of information. The second-handedness of the learned world is the secret of its mediocrity.

From: Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education. 1952

- It is an opportunity to explore one's interests, capabilities, and career potentials.

- It is an opportunity for increased understanding of the world of work and how society gets its goods and services.

The study of the world of work in a first-hand way results in understandings of the skills and requirements for participating in it. These are essential elements of an education for an advanced industrialized society. A monolithic educational system that directs its energies in a single, pre-college track has lost its reason for being in a great democratic society such as ours. It continues to ignore the needs and desires of "the forgotten half" of the population it is to serve.

And above all, --

- It is a program, a place, and an opportunity for many students to become a somebody.
  If you don't do anything for a student, help him/her to be a somebody.

  Lawrence Derthick, former Commissioner of Education USOE

Access and its Implications

Access as a concept related to the conduct of vocational education programs has three major dimensions. First, there is the concept of access with respect to the availability of vocational programs and/or course offerings to all individuals. The second dimension is the all-important issue of access to knowledge once the individual is in the program or course. The third element is access to the services provided through vocational education. These three dimensions of access to vocational education are based on the fundamental idea that vocational education is an integral part of the total education system and not separate or apart from the mainstream of education in our public and post-secondary schools.

Access in the first concept dealing with the availability of programs and courses is related to the issue of who can participate in the programs, and courses provided under the aegis of vocational education. The Federal legislation identifies certain populations or groups such as the disadvantaged, the handicapped, males, females (sex bias elimination), adult, Indian and Hawaiian, single parents, homemakers, criminal and delinquent offenders, post secondary students, displaced workers and the unemployed. Of course there is also the secondary school student who elects to enroll in the vocational program.

However, it is important to note that access to vocational education must not be limited to those populations listed in the Federal Vocational Act. The Federal contribution accounts for only approximately ten percent of the money expended for vocational education in the public schools of Maryland. In the larger context, the schools of Maryland including vocational education are the property of the total State or jurisdiction.

This would imply that all persons at the appropriate developmental levels should be able to access such programs. Specifically this would mean that the vocational programs and course offerings should be open to the gifted and talented, the academic student and the general student even though they many not choose to major in any of the specialized vocational programs.

Such students should be able to access specific courses provided they have the background development to achieve in such offerings.

Obstacles to Access

The difficulties encountered by individuals seeking access to vocational programs, courses and services take on many forms, some of which are easier to understand or rationalize than others. The following are some of the perceived reasons gathered from a number of sources.

1. Students are unaware that the opportunities to access vocational offerings are available.

One of the obstacles to access is the matter of getting information to the student so that he/she can make decisions regarding the direction to go. A position paper of the National Association of State Directors of Vocational Education (1988) contains the statement: "Secondary and post-secondary VTE curricula must be more decisively articulated. At the secondary level, students need an improved understanding of how various courses can lead to advanced preparation in both two-year and four-year colleges." ...(p.4)

2. High school graduation requirements.

3. Student's preoccupation with college entrance requirements and not exploring their own capabilities, interests and potentials.

4. Students being advised out of vocational opportunities.

The issue of access, in some instances, takes on the form of school enrollment manipulation in order to maintain financial support to the home school. Catherine Foster (1988), writing in The Christian Science Monitor, described the situation in the following comment:

> Some students who would be good candidates for vocational education are steered away by school personnel, who, in the time of declining enrollment, are reluctant to let students transfer out of academic schools because they don't want to lose state aid based on attendance. ...

5. Attitudes of school personnel regarding vocational education.

6. Parental attitudes towards vocational education.

7. Travel time to go to and from vocational centers.

8. Students find it difficult to work vocational offerings into their schedule.

Frequently, access to vocational courses is prohibited or deterred because of the multiple hour scheduling (two or three consecutive periods per day) procedure. A school system that is directed towards meeting the educational goals of all students should not establish scheduling procedures that inhibit the individual student's achievement of legitimate personal educational goals. Scheduling has frequently been identified as the reason why these other populations can not access a given course or offering. Some suggestions in this area might include:

1. Offering some sections of a vocational course on a single period basis.

2. Operating programs on a seven or eight period day, thus allowing additional times or opportunities for access to vocational education.

3. Opening evening and Saturday classes to regularly enrolled students.

4. Offering courses at out-of-school hours over local educational television facilities.

5. Admitting students to lecture-demonstration sessions regularly held as a part of selected vocational courses.

6. Conducting mini courses in and outside of the regularly scheduled school days.

7. Conducting Summer programs with broad student access policies.

Access to Knowledge

The second dimension of the access issue is what may be termed "access to knowledge." This concept of access moves beyond that of entrance into programs and courses in vocational education. Gaining access into the program or course is only the first step. Access to knowledge in the context of this presentation is aimed at assuring the individual that he/she once admitted will be able to attain levels of understanding and achievement commensurate with their capabilities.

The access to knowledge idea is based on the concept of education and teaching that reaches out to students --- to seek, --- to understand, --- to negotiate, --- and to utilize to the fullest extent their capabilities in the learning process. The maximum fulfillment of each and every individual is the primary goal of education in this country.

> ...Our deepest conviction impel us to foster individual fulfillment. We wish each one to achieve the promise that is in him (her). We wish each one to be worthy of free society, and strengthen a free society.
> ...It is still one of the most radical ideas in human history, yet it grew out of the American soil as naturally as wheat or corn.
>
> John W. Garner in --
> (1) Goals for Americans
> (2) No Easy Victories

This concept of "access to knowledge" is fundamental to the basic functioning of our educational system and the principles undergirding our democratic ideals. It is recognized that the achievement of access to knowledge is a much more difficult task as most informed educators would attest. However, it is a goal to be achieved and it will happen to the extent to which teaching is geared to the learning styles of the students and not as a single, monolithic form of instruction for all individuals.

Benjamin Bloom (1972) in a discussion of "Individual Differences in Learning" made the following statement:

> ...we have come to understand that under appropriate learning conditions, students differ in the rate at which they can learn -- not in the level to which they can achieve or in their basic capacity to learn. ...Studies in which these ideas have been applied to actual school subjects reveal as high as 90 percent of the students can learn these school subjects up to the same standard that the top ten percent of students have been learning under usual conditions.

The "access to knowledge" concept is integrally tied in with two other ideas. They are "quality" and "efficiency." The "access to knowledge" or "access to Vocational Education" concepts are of little or no avail if the quality of content and instruction is not at a significant level. Quality in this context is directed towards the substance of the content as well as the delivery system. Efficiency is required and essential in the processes of instruction and the means by which it takes place.

> Along with the implications and concepts that the term "access" has in regard to all education, two other notions, summed up in the words "quality and efficiency", must also be considered. Application of any one of these concepts without consideration of the other two makes any sort of education system accountability impossible.
>
> From: Communique, a newsletter of the State Council on Vocational-Technical Education from Minnesota

The "access to knowledge" as well as access for student performance is tied in with the processes and strategies of teaching and learning. Some issues and elements in the teaching and learning process that should have serious consideration would include:

1. The recognition by teachers and staff personnel of the individual differences that exist in the student population.

2. Awareness of the existence of different motivational processes that operate in each student and their impact on performance.

3. The potential for experiential involvement in a broad range of meaningful activities by the student.

4. The enormous opportunity that exists in the vocational laboratory setting for the conduct of a broad range of teaching strategies.

5. The recognition that the content in most vocational programs is multi-level in its technical content as well as skill requirement.

The "access to knowledge" in the vocational program or course context may be facilitated in the instructional processes through the utilization of such procedures as --

1. Individualization of instruction as deemed necessary.
2. Use of programmed instruction.
3. Use of laboratory or instructional assistants.
4. Use of support service personnel with certain special populations.
5. Use of video instruction and other forms of media applications.
6. Use of support personnel from business and industry.
7. Use of retired persons with technical skills in appropriate areas.
8. Use of small group instruction techniques.
9. Use of partner or "buddy" system of laboratory activity.
10. Use of computerized instructional processes.
11. Use of independent study procedures.
12. Use of internships and field experiences.
13. Use of a broad range of reward systems.
14. Use of a broad range of reading materials.

The achieving of "access to knowledge" is symbiotic in its requirement for a broad professional team approach involving teachers, counselors, psychologists, curriculum specialists, administrators and at times numerous auxiliary services. Access to knowledge is the challenge that all schools must face and it is a highly individualized process. As Dr. Thomas Pullen, a past Superintendent of Schools for the State of Maryland, put it in an address to the Maryland State Teachers Association:

> By the laws on the books of the State of Maryland, every student is legally entitled to an education -- and you as teachers have the moral responsibility to see that they get it.

Access to Services

A third dimension of the access issue centers around the matter of "access to services" available to individuals through vocational education. Services that may be available through vocational education would include such items as --

1. Career advisement.
2. Personal resume development assistance.
3. Employment opportunities announcements.
4. Work skills inventory development assistance.
5. Employment and workskills conference participation.
6. Maryland Career Information Delivery System services.
7. Aptitude testing.
8. Local Education Agency employment information delivery systems.
9. Exploratory program offerings.
10. Independent study and tutoring.

The modern school provides a broad range of services to the students as well as the public in general. This is in sharp contrast to the early public and private schools in America. These services take on two broad categories. There are those services that are associated with the internal management or jurisdiction of the school system including health services, counseling, transportation, placement, testing, etc. A second category includes those services that are secured from the community (public and private) agencies. Such external services also include those available from federal, state, county or city sources.

The services offered through or in association with vocational education are the legitimate prerogative of all students. The access to and use of such services by all students does in a measure contribute to the objectives of vocational education, regardless of the curriculum in which one is enrolled. That is to say, the academic (college bound) student who takes advantage of the placement services for Summer employment is in fact receiving an advantage from a vocational service as well as contributing to his/her understandings of an occupational nature.

Summary Comment

Vocational education as an integral part of the total educational system in these United States has a valuable and unique role to play. Its content extends across many of the academics disciplines and is relevant to the individual's daily living as well as the personal exploration of one's interests, capabilities, and aspirations. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of the mathematics, science, economics, and social studies experienced in the other parts of the educational program.

This paper on "access to vocational education" is based on the concept that this field of study has much to contribute to the more complete education of all students, regardless of school program or career aspiration. Access to programs or courses, access to knowledge, and access to services should not be withheld from any student who is capable of profiting from the experience. This presentation is also based on the concept that the school should contribute to the maximum development of every student and not just meet minimum standards for graduation or entrance into a college or university.